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Jazzletter

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Letters

In the U.K., should one hear a cuckoo (the first?) very early in spring, it is almost a national idiosyncrasy to inform such an august journal as the *Times*, at the same time asking, "Is this a record?"

Might I therefore enclose, with great pleasure, what is possibly the first subscription from Scotland for your erudite *Jazzletter* and, as one who was a member of Benny Goodman's 1948 London Palladium quartet — surviving such an experience exhilarated but unscathed — ask, "Is this a double record?"

I don't *think* I'm the first cuckoo, but who knows?

Peter Chilver, Edinburgh, Scotland

Alas, Julius LaRosa bought a gift subscription for a friend in Scotland about two weeks before your letter arrived. There are actually more Jazzletter *readers in Italy than Scotland. And so a particularly warm welcome aboard, Peter.*

Name that Song

by Bill Crow

When I was sixteen I worked after school in a meat market in my home town. Jake, one of the butchers, enjoyed telling me jokes, and would occasionally pass me a slip of butcher paper with a word game or puzzle scribbled on it. He would continue cutting steaks and chops while watching me, his eyebrows raised with expectant delight as he waited for me to get the joke.

One of the first he handed me read: Mahatma Ghandi's address to the English. "Vyizdur zomenimore orzizaziz zanzariz orziz?"

I stared at the words without comprehension for several minutes. When I finally pronounced them phonetically, I broke up. This encouraged Jake to slip me another:

"AB, CD goldfish!"

"L, MNO goldfish."

"OSAR2, CM!"

It took me a minute to realize that each letter sounded like a word.

Jake's next offering was titled *Conversations between Two Greeks in a Diner.*

"FUNEM?"

"S, VFM."

"FUNEX?"

"OS, VFX."

"OK, LFMNX."

I remembered these games and showed them to my son when he was little. I revived them again recently, applying them to song titles for the entertainment of my friend Joe Wilder, who has the locker next to mine in the bandroom of New York's Majestic theater. Having run out of reading material in the pit one evening, I concocted the following list of songs. The only rule is that all capital letters are to be pronounced as they are named in the alphabet.

NMLO tone
NSNT meant L mood
mood ND go
ND mood
T42
I12B ha P
4LV no
SAPT2 say goodnight
on DLMO
DLAD SA tramp
D more ICU
SLND game
NDN summer
MAG nation
mel ODNF
D moon SELO
gil T
miss T
cab RA
BMI love
IB leave NU
UND night ND music
DIND my T
MNO cow N
NV got fun
B on DC
nice NEZ
DLE cat
quiet CT
thinking FU
but BUT ful
SN tit romantic
it might SLB spring
SUSRSUN my BB
LCUN my dreams
LFAPNO
LBCNU
MLE
PSLFU
LBD lighted 2C NE NE1 thinks of.

— BC

Ma Perkins Meets Ted Turner

Are you old enough to remember *The Romance of Helen Trent*?

Long before *The Colbys*, *Dallas*, *Falcon Crest*, *One Day at a Time*, *General Hospital*, and *Search for Tomorrow*, there were the real, the original, the archetypal soap operas. The term was coined for them. If you're so young that you don't know how

these modern shows, whose sponsors include such nonsudsing products as Toyota and Mazola, came to be called soap operas, your life will be incredibly illuminated to know that the network-radio daytime dramas of yore were usually sponsored by sundry "soap flakes" and "soap chips". The term "detergent" had not yet come into use, although you can, if you like, store in your useless information file the fact that Oscar Wilde used the word in *The Canterville Ghost*. These products included Oxydol, Rinso (music: "Rinso White, Rinso White, happy little washday song"), Duz, Fels Naphtha, and Ivory Flakes. These products were to wash what goes on you; to wash you, you had Palmolive, Lady Esther, and Camay ("the soap of beautiful women") and whichever soap gave you "the skin you love to touch," a little antediluvian sensualism there. There was also Lux soap, to do you, and Lux Flakes, to do your undies. Lux presented Hollywood, with Cecil B. DeMille as the organ-voiced host. For the hardy lower-class element among us, there was Lifebuoy soap which came in an unglamorous red bar and smelled austerely of carbolic acid. My grandfather was hardier than anybody. He was a blacksmith who could hold glowing-red coals on his palm, and at the end of his day he used a product called Snap. It was a gritty gray-white abrasive paste that came in a can, and it sure as hell would clean your hands. Ivory Soap was touted in ads as being "ninety-nine and forty-four one hundred percent pure — it floats!" They never told you pure what, or what connection there might be between purity and buoyancy. One can think of many impure things that float.

These shows included, besides *The Romance of Helen Trent*, such steady and sturdy dray-mas as *Mary Noble, Backstage Wife*; *Ma Perkins*; *The Goldbergs*, *Mary Marlin*, *Just Plain Bill (Barber of Hartville)*; *One Man's Family*, *The Road of Life*, *Lorenzo Jones (and his wife Belle)*; *Life Can Be Beautiful* (all about Chi-Chi and Papa David and Steven Hamilton, who was confined to a wheelchair); and *Our Gal Sunday*, which each day asked whether a girl from a small western mining town could find happiness in her marriage to a titled Englishman.

There were a few adroit comedies as well, including *Vic and Sade* and *Easy Aces*. Dave Frishberg, who is an encyclopedia of these shows, puts Vic and Sade in a class with the work of Thurber, Benchley, and Lardner, and he rates Paul Rhymer, who wrote them, as one of the great American humorists. Dave has tapes of forty of the Vic and Sade episodes, so if you catch him between sets, just ask and he'll fill you in about Rush and Uncle Fletcher and Rush's friend Bluetooth Johnson and Mr. Gumpox the garbage man. These two shows really don't belong in the category of the soap operas, but they ran in the daytime among the soaps.

Kids got to hear the soap operas only when they were home sick. In the course of numerous maladies, I analyzed the format of these shows, young as I was. Each one ran fifteen minutes a day. The episode began with theme music, then went to the commercial, promising you a whiter brighter wash, the same thing they're pitching now after generations of New and Improved versions of the products. Then an announcer earnestly recapitulated the events of yesterday's program. By this time you were five minutes into the show. After that came about five minutes of new developments, after which there would be another commercial and then the over-and-out recapitulation of the theme music. In that slower age, the plots of these melodramas moved a little faster than a tree sloth, and if you got laid up with the 'flu (we had not yet reached the age of naming its varieties) three or four times in the course of the school year, you could, from your bed of pain, pick up the plot of *Ma Perkins*, even if you hadn't heard the show for three months, over the churning of your mother's washing machine — a sound that Gerry Mulligan memorialized in his tune *Maytag*.

In late afternoon, when kids came trailing home from school — it was a world in which they rarely disappeared and child pornographers did not exist and hitch-hiking was a safe thing to do and crack was a something in a sidewalk that you didn't step on and the most serious cause of a boy's late appearance was an impromptu softball game — the soap operas gave way to the kids' shows: *Don Winslow of the U.S. Navy* (whup-whup-whup!), *Renfrew of the Mounted* (sound of whistling wind), *Jungle Jim*, and *Jack Armstrong, the Allllll-American Boy*. Gerry Mulligan, if I haven't mentioned this before, is the only man I ever met who knew all the lyrics to the theme song of this latter program, and belatedly taught them to me in a New York taxi, thereby adding considerably to the clutter in the attic of my mind: "Wave the flag for Hudson High, boys, show them how we stand. Ever shall our team be champion, known throughout the land. Have you triiiiied Wheaties, they're whole wheat and all of the bran. Have you triiiiied Wheaties, the best breakfast food in the land!" (Even then I was bothered by the rhyme of "bran" to "land".)

Some of these shows used what seemed to me to be original music, simply because I hadn't heard it before. I can't recall whether Mary Noble or Mary Marlin came on the air to the sound of those thirds at the start of Debussy's *Clair de lune*, but that was the first place I ever heard the piece. And what I thought was the Shadow's personal tailor-made eerie music turned out to be *The Wheel of Omphale* by Saint-Saens. The soap operas weren't much "into" original scoring, I guess. The movies too were not averse to lifting the "classics", and horror pictures of the 1930s would use snatches of Beethoven, Rachmaninoff, and Tchaikovsky played by scaled-down orchestras. A bit of the *Fingal's Cave Overture* turned up often as suspense music in serials, including, I think, one called *Robinson Crusoe of Clipper Island*, which no one in the world seems to remember but me. (It starred an Eskimo from Alaska named Mala. More useless information.)

Most of the radio soap operas ran five days a week, although a few were heard Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Then there were the heavy-duty dramas heard once a week and lasting a half hour, as befit their importance and bigger budgets. These included *I Love a Mystery*, *Bulldog Drummond*, *Gang Busters*, *Big Town* (Steve Wilson of the *Illustrated Press*), *The Lone Ranger*, who arrived to the strains of the *William Tell Overture*, and *The Shadow*, who knew, and who had the power to cloud men's minds so that they could see him. In real life he was Lamont Cranston, wealthy young man-about-town (I used to wonder what a man-about-town was), but his true identity was known only to the lovely Margot Lane. Margot Lane was a sidekick. Whether they, as they say nowadays, ever got it on, I did not know; indeed it never even occurred to me to ask, no more than it did to wonder what Steve Wilson of the *Illustrated Press* did with or to Lorelei Kilburn when they weren't solving crimes. Lorelei and Margot were sidekicks, and they served the same practical function that Tonto did in *The Lone Ranger* — they allowed dialogue to happen. Without them, writers would have been hard put to advance the plot.

These shows lent the days a certain stately progression. The sequence began with *Don MacNeil's Breakfast Club*. Does anybody remember a program called *Mirth and Madness*? It seems to me they played some hip music on that show. After

these eye-opener programs, the day moved on with reassuring predictability through the soap operas to the late-afternoon kids' shows, then to the really big shows of the evening.

What most of the soap operas had in common — aside from the undeviating structure of commercial-recap-plot-commercial — was the electric organ. The theme music was usually played on some form of this instrument, probably the Hammond, with full ululating vibrato from chord to chord. I think these shows instilled the nascent music-lovers among us, in the course of recovering from colds, influenza, measles, chicken pox, and mumps, with a detestation of the instrument comparable only to our loathing for Hawaiian guitar and the accordion, an instrument that also whined nasally. It took Ernie Felice, Art Van Damme, and Gordie Flemming to relieve me of my dislike of the latter, Count Basie and Jimmy Smith to convince me that the electric organ might have some redeeming social value.

It is now more than twenty years since Rachel Elkind, my neighbor in New York, brought me a test pressing of the album she had produced by Wendy (at that time still Walter) Carlos — *Switched-on Bach*. I was fascinated by the album, and by the synthesizer and its potential. "Seventy-five or eighty years from now," I said, or maybe I wrote it somewhere, "some little kid is going to say, 'Daddy, what was an orchestra?' and Daddy is going to say, 'A primitive synthesizer that took a hundred men to play.'"

I was wrong. It didn't take seventy-five years. We're almost at that point now. You rarely see a string section on a record date, and drum machines are replacing drummers. An acquaintance of mine attended a London recording session whose engineer became all discombobulated by the drummer setting up his snare and cymbals and the rest: he had never recorded "real" drums before.

Horn For Sale

The late Bobby Hackett put one of his horns up for sale. A potential buyer asked him, "Is this horn used?"

Bobby growled, in that way his friends remember, "The middle register is used. The upper register is brand new."

— contributed by Bill Berry

The synthesizers have caused panic unemployment in all the major recording centers. Jazz recordings began to use the new keyboards years ago, so much so that if you hear string "roofs" over a jazz solo, they're almost certainly coming from a synthesizer, or an emulator, which is the computer that actually samples sounds of real instruments and reproduces them. Five years ago I heard an Italian recording whose string sound was strikingly realistic, right down to the articulation.

At its best, the synthesizers are new instruments on which truly creative things can be done. The best jazz use of the instrument that I have heard is made by Bernie Senensky in Toronto. I heard Bernie with the Moe Koffman group some months ago. He had a battery of synthesizers around him. Bernie played some thrilling solos — "live" and in "real time"! — on his keyboards. At one point he flicked some switch or another and played a post-bebop very outside solo on what sounded like Caribbean steel drums. It was quite funny.

But synthesizers are rarely used to the greatest creative advantage and, at a lower level, they have a built-in problem, germinal even in *Switched-on Bach*.

Hearing, I would reiterate at the risk of tedium, is one of the most important of our survival devices. All our senses contribute to survival. Characteristics developed in a species persist only if they do so. Hearing is a much more primitive sense than sight. It is an early-warning system that functions through the quick identification of sounds. If you touch your hand to something hot, you will reflexively pull it back long before you have had time to "understand" what has happened. Were it otherwise, the burn would be far more serious, possibly fatal. We are born with reflexes triggered by the sense of touch. I am convinced we also *are born with* a fundamental repertoire of emotional responses to sound, and from birth on add more sounds to that catalogue of noises.

It has long been a truism of psychology that we are born with only two fears — of falling and loud noises. Alfred Hitchcock built a career on them, spinning a camera to a vertiginous height above Martin Balsam at a stairhead just as Bernard Herman's score hit you with a pulsating screech of high strings at high volume in *Psycho*; putting Cary Grant and Eva Marie Saint on the foreheads of Mount Rushmore in *North by Northwest*; having Joel McRea (apparently) get pushed out of a high tower in *Foreign Correspondent*; and so forth.

My cats are afraid of a large owl that resides in our neighborhood. Nobody taught them to be. I never told them, when they were little, "Kids, watch out for owls." They come home when he hoots. They also fear fire, even the smell of it. During the great Ojai fires of July, 1985, they wouldn't venture outdoors. They just *know* what these things are. No. More than that: they don't know at all, in our sense, which would infer self-aware conscious thought; their neuro-emotional-muscular systems simply function according to codes deep in their electro-chemical makeup.

Somebody accidentally discovered in California that inflated rubber snakes will keep birds out of your garden. How do birds know about snakes — know to the point where they react to what amounts to a visual symbol of one? Somebody else discovered that cattle will not cross a grating that seems to offer uncertain footing. So all through the American west, you see steel grids instead of gates at the entrances to fenced terrain. Cows just won't cross them. Ah! But then somebody found that you can paint white stripes on black pavement to *look like* a grid, and cattle won't cross that either. Nobody told the cow that it should not put a hoof on possibly uncertain ground; it just "knows", and knows it with such a certainty that you can deceive it with what amounts to a written symbol for a grid. So I am not about to accept, in this age after Freud, that all or even most of the important things that we "know" are learned, a daring statement in that there are at least three psychiatrists and a neurologist in our little group. I think our species and its ancestors have for so many millenia been classifying and cataloguing sounds — wind, rain, sleet, surf, sighs, chirps, footfalls, growls, snarls, hisses, laughter, weeping, clangs, clunks, cracks, rips — that we respond to them instantly, just as we pull a hand from a pot handle before we "know" it is hot.

If we have inborn responses to some sounds, we *acquire* sensitivity to others. The rattlesnake has resided in the Western Hemisphere much longer than man. The immediate response to its rattle is probably acquired — for most of us nowadays, from the movies. Interestingly, one acquires a sensitivity to the gadget known as the Rainbird, used to water lawns and gardens, because it produces a sound resembling that of a rattlesnake on half alert. So we learn new sounds and store them somewhere in the brain with those other sounds whose meaning has caused responses in our species from far back in *la nuit des temps*, as the French say — the night of time.

This brings us back to the synthesizer.

Whatever sound the mind cannot classify accurately and instantly it processes by comparing it to known sounds. It is for this reason that in the efforts of Morton Sobotnick and Otto Luening and their successors to produce a truly "abstract" music, they have been done the opposite. The mind "reads" these sounds by their similarities to other things, running a series of images to go with them: wind-birds-pieplates-tires-rain and so forth. Don't forget that before Lyndon Johnson debased the coinage, we could all tell the denomination of a nickel, dime, quarter, or half buck by its sound when it hit the sidewalk. There is no sound in "nature" as abstract as that of a sixty-man string section. All attempts of synthesizer programmers have failed to produce a single sound that the "mind" accepts as unknown.

I raised this point with Wendy Carlos that first afternoon I heard *Switched-on Bach*. Does this sound or that from the synthesizer not get classified by the mind as tuned pie-plates, or rhythmic wind, or the breaking of glass — or a trombone crossed with a kazoo? Does this sound not seem like a mixture of a bird-call and water running over rocks? Watch *Forbidden Planet*, one of the early movies to use an all-electronic score, and notice how the "music" gets its emotional effects by suggesting sounds that we know and can classify as safe or threatening, including the implied snarl of the beast from the mind (or the "monster from the id", as it is called in the picture) when it is caught in an electronic fence. You'll see how your emotions can be manipulated by sounds — not music, just sounds. The early experiments in *musique concrete* in France proved that.

Of course, electronic music predates *Switched-on Bach* and *Forbidden Planet* and for that matter the experiments of Sobotnick, Luening, et al. Miklos Rosza used a theramin in the score of *Spellbound* in 1946. It was an instrument you played by placing your hands in a magnetic field above it. It produced a curious whistling sound, and here again, the mind instantly classified it: it sounded like a cross between a wordless human voice and a musical saw. The same could be said of sounds issuing from an early French electronic instrument, the *Onde Martineau*, which I heard on a Leo Ferre record as far back as 1955 or thereabouts. (At least I think that's what the instrument was.) In a sense, that ghastly Hammond-organ music of those early soap operas constituted electronic music. And it sounded like just what it was: an imitation in turn of the pipe organ.

The surprising thing is not that electronic music is widely used, which everyone with any brains, in view of the implacable avarice in show biz, predicted it would be, but how poorly it is used —how little it has actually progressed since the days of Ma Perkins and Mary Noble. We've gone from *Just Plain Bill* to just plain bull. The stuff is everywhere, overused and misused, and nowhere more so than in film and television scoring.

I found the film *Ladyhawke* delightful. But it was marred by the occasional use of electronic sounds and rock rhythms in the score, both disconcertingly inappropriate to the medieval setting of the story. (Actually, I was bothered by the first use of amplified guitar in a western movie. I kept wondering where the amplifier was plugged in.) Nowhere have I heard a more inept use of electronic "music" than in Maurice Jarre's score to *Witness*, a story set among the Amish of Lancaster County in Pennsylvania. The Amish are a people who have resisted all modern technology, building barns without nails and declining even to drive automobiles. What in the world was a synthesizer doing in *that* movie? At the point where some of the farmers are singing, the contrast between "real" and synthesized music is grating. And what an opportunity was lost! Had the music of these people been used in contrast to synthesized rock music in scenes of the cities and towns of the story, the conflict of two ways of life would have been heightened. Rarely have I heard music so clumsily used in a film.

Whether because it is fashionable or because movie producers and the studios who distribute their pictures find it cheaper to do movie scores with synthesizers is a question to which I have no answer, because I cannot summon up the enthusiasm to research which of two forms of stupidity is the dominant one. Whichever the reason, film after film and TV show after TV show is scored with synthesizers. One effect of this is the growing unemployment of real musicians in Hollywood, New York, and elsewhere, composers and players alike. A benign if accidental side effect is that some superbly seasoned players who have been wasting their talents, albeit profitably, on ten-second cues in movies or making rock-and-rollers sound as if they're musicians, have gone back to jazz full-time, to the great improvement of their playing. If you listen to a few of them, you can hear this progressive reblossoming of talent, particularly in California, where -- according to a deep but only partly unjustified New York prejudice — the playing is traditionally laid-back, laconic, and too easily smiling. There's an edge coming back into the work of these former denizens of Glen Glenn, and sometimes it's quite thrilling to hear. Their playing has started to burn again, you can hear the tightening up of their time.

Replacing both players and composers are synthesizer programmers and keyboard players faking it as composers. The consequence is a horrid decline in the quality of film scores. I'm not talking about the scores in which synthesizers are sometimes used incidentally, like those of Jerry Goldsmith. Jerry Goldsmith is a musician, a real one, one of the best, and he very early on made a study of the synthesizers and what they would do. When he does use them, it is often in conjunction with "real" instruments; and even when he uses them pure, it is always musically and intelligently.

But most of the "composers" coming into TV and film scoring are untalented young people convincing yuppie producers and directors who grew up on rock and roll that the sounds they are taping are music. There are exceptions -- I think James Horner and Bruce Broughton are talented younger composers -- but almost all the music now heard in films is dreadful trash. You hear great long rudimentary chords held forever while something goes whoosh-whoosh-whoosh rhythmically beneath it, or maybe whung-whung-whung. Worst of all, as one composer pointed out to me, the stuff doesn't *breathe*. It's like orlon and nylon and the other synthetics; it isn't alive and it never was.

The stuff is most offensive, most disconcerting, most distracting from the story, when it is used in any kind of period story, whether it be the 1940s or the 1490s. The sheer fact of its electronicism, if you want to call it that, draws attention to itself, taking away from the story. In sixty years of film scoring, we have unconsciously accepted a convention that all cues are source cues. (Source cues are segments of music that seem to be coming from a "real" source in the movie, a radio, jukebox, musicians in a nightclub.) Granted they did not have French horns in the age of Ivanhoe, but most people do not know that, and we accept their use in a story of that period. Electronic music, however, presents a problem in that we do know that this is a "modern" sound, and it is garishly inappropriate to stories set in the past, quite aside from the lack of skill with which it is used in tales set in the present or future. It *intrudes*. And it distracts.

Where does it belong? In horror stories — *Friday the Thirteenth* and the like? It doesn't even seem to work there. I have yet to hear one of these scores that remotely approached Bernard Herman's *Psycho* score, and Herman used nothing but strings; there isn't even any percussion in that score, if memory serves me.

The strange thing (or maybe it isn't so strange) is that these composers who have come to adulthood — I won't say maturity —in the age of the synthesizers do not know how to use them. It takes a Johnny Mandel or a Jerry Goldsmith or a Leonard Rosenman to do that, people who have grown up with "real" music and look at the synthesizer as *an* instrument rather than *the* instrument.

The "new" composers stumble on effects like tuned pie-plates, whine of wind, chirp of birds, gurgle of water, surf, sighs, gasps and growls. To scare you, they'll make noises like a heartbeat or breathing. And that's the more imaginative ones, who understand the equipment. The majority of the "new" composers end up producing sounds that are remarkably like, well, the theme music on those 1930s and '40s soap operas. In other words, the instruments used sound like fancy (and sometimes not even very fancy) electric organs.

One of the worst uses of music, if you want to call it that, was in the Michael Caine film *The Holcroft Convention*. The synthesizer utilized sounded pretty much like the Mighty Wurlitzer, as they used to call it, that you heard in old-time movie houses. The Wurlitzer, a remarkable instrument actually, was extensively used in the silent movie days. And the curious effect of the synthesizer that seemed to be imitating it was not to make *The Holcroft Convention* seem modern but, quite to the contrary, to make it feel like a 1920s picture with audible dialogue and gunshot noises. It was utterly destructive to the film, and bad music to boot. It was "composed" by someone or something (one never knows nowadays) named Stanislas. May he, she, they, or it spend eternity in an anechoic chamber with nothing but a pile of score paper and a Scripto pencil without lead.

The most dismal example I have encountered of the use of music in a TV series occurs on *Miami Vice*. Though I had read good reviews of the show, I could not watch it at all in its early days because of its heavy-handed use of rock music as underscoring. The show illustrated vividly the extreme emotional constriction of rock and roll. Thirty-five years after *Rock Around the Clock*, and thirty-one years after the advent of Elvis Presley, it still is capable of evoking only the harsh, the rough, the angry, the brutal. It is therefore useful on occasion for suspense-and-danger scenes. But it cannot evoke moods of gentleness, exaltation, reflection, lyricism.

There was of course a time when jazz was assumed to be incapable of these nuances, but that theory ended with the breakthroughs of Henry Mancini in *Peter Gunn* and *Mr. Lucky*. The true pioneer jazz musician in film scoring was Benny Carter, but Mancini is the one who made jazz widely acceptable in the film industry, and thanks to his example the Hollywood doors opened for Johnny Mandel, Quincy Jones, Oliver Nelson, Benny Golson, and more. Alas, they have now almost closed again.

Although Mancini was assailed by some jazz critics for not using "pure" jazz (whatever that is) in scores, the fact is that he demonstrated in ensemble passages and solo work — albeit controlled solo work; he was writing film scores, not albums — a range of expressivity in jazz more or less equal to that of "classical" music. It could be delightfully humorous, as in Plas Johnson's *Pink Panther* tenor solos or in the Jimmy Rowles boogie-woogie caliope solo in *Baby Elephant Walk*, in *Hatari*; lightly romantic, as in the *Mr. Lucky* theme; deeply tender, as in the Rowles piano solo in *Piano and Strings* in *The Pink Panther*; ominous, as in the *Peter Gunn* theme itself. Mancini — who, interestingly, wrote some of the very first rock movie scores during his anonymous days on staff at Universal — proved, first in his television scores and later in films, that jazz could do it all. *Miami Vice* has proved that rock can't.

And since its early days, *Miami Vice* has turned more and more to that dreary watery synthesizer sound, those long Hammond-organ-like chords with underlying whacka-whacka-whacka, sometimes varied by whucka-whucka-whucka, rhythms in vague allusion to breathing or heartbeats or footfalls or rattlesnakes.

When composers try to escape the abstractions of musical principle, it seems, they perforce can give us only imitations of the sounds of nature, in which case we might as well hear the heavy asthmatic telephone breathing of Ross Martin in *Experiment in Terror*. It was very effective. What *Miami Vice* demonstrates is not the limitations of electronic sound but the limitations of the present generation of film "composers" using electronic sound, and, even more, the musical ignorance and laminated-in-plastic insensitivity of a generation of producers, directors, and network programmers who grew up on rock and now, through television, are imposing their intellectual and esthetic limitations on the public. Perhaps that doesn't carry the thought far enough, for, presumably, and this is an even gloomier reflection, the public for whom they are creating such shows doesn't know the difference, having grown up in the same desensitizing music, proselytized by that music to the same dope-fried-brain, unromantic, perfunctory, and uncommitted coupling, brought now to a strange and sudden halt by the ironic apparition of AIDS, in an epidemic of marriages inspired not by love but by fear. In any case, for television music, it's been a long tumble from *Peter Gunn* to the dark at the bottom of the stairs which is *Miami Vice*.

In TV commercials, the situation is worse. The producers, they too having grown up on rock, conspicuously do not know what music even is. And they have compounded the torture of those of us who do by employing the ugliest voices in the history of singing, people who all sound like they have trained on the hemorhoidal anguish of Bob Dylan or, worse, David Clayton Thomas and his heirs and assigns. These voices are almost all raspy, pushed, harsh.

There are some happy exceptions. Now and then, for example, one can spot Bonnie Herman's voice. Another is found in that marvelously hip and swinging Mazola commercial that sounds as if Gene Puerling wrote the music and Jon Hendricks sang lead. Another is the voice in a current Stouffer's pizza commercial. "Help yourself to Stouffer's pizza!" we are importuned. I have no idea who the singer is, but he is excellent. He sounds like no one else, not like Sinatra, not Ray Charles, not

Notice

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Long Island club singers, not country-and-western people. His enunciation is impeccable and at the same time somehow deeply American without being identifiably regional. The voice has a bit of an edge to it. He swings, he has sharp-shooter intonation and time to go with it, he is effortless, and there is joy in his work. What's a nice voice like this doing in a commercial like that? Making a lot of money, of course. But how I'd like to hear an album of good songs by this guy.

In stark contrast is that commercial for Anacin or Tylenol or Bufferin (so much for product identification) or some other analgesic, in which you see a guy driving fence posts, and then another one working an air hammer on a city street. The voice sings "When I haven't got tahm (meaning time) for the pain," and repeats it. The voice on that commercial was so ugly that I instantly switched the sound off whenever it appeared. Apparently I wasn't the only one who found it so. People in voting numbers, not of the age of the yuppie but the age of arthritis, must have turned the horror off, because the singer has been replaced. The new voice is still harsh and ugly, but nowhere as much so as the original. If you want to sell to the people who buy analgesics, why not get Jack Jones or Joe Williams or somebody else who can actually sing? The makers of a current McDonald's commercial, chasing the family trade, were smart enough to use a singer imitating Bobby Darin.

A few years ago, many local news shows in the big cities sent their "aging" anchormen and women off to oblivion and replaced them with bland, blond, brainless, pretty younger people, mixed with a few young token ethnics, to attract that audience that did not then and does not now watch the news, not because they would not accept information from "older" people, but because they're not interested. Bring on the yuppies, get them in front of the tube! At the same time, the stations scrapped much of the music used to introduce these shows, substituting all sorts of synthesized excitement to crank up your adrenalin. But the sponsors and ad agencies know better. The products advertised on news shows still are those intended for older people. We get Patricia Neal, in a curiously tasteless example of type casting, warning about recovering from a stroke, and sales pitches for health insurance in which Glenn Ford, Eddie Albert, Danny Thomas, Lorne Green, and others trailing clouds of fading glory, further demean their reputations by reading let's-scare-the-hell-out-of-the-old-folks messages.

If you really want to know who watches the news on television, turn on Ted Turner's CNN station for a few hours and observe not so much the news — the best and least compromised on television, be it noted in passing — but the commercials. Almost without exception they're for products used by older people. *Time*, *Life*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *American Heritage*, the various analgesics, Milk of Magnesia, a *Reader's Digest* album that includes *Waltz of the Flowers*, *Tales from the Vienna Woods*, and *The Toreador Song* ("without," we are reassured, "one unknown unwanted passage"), talking bibles, and other products designed for people trudging toward the abyss, all pitch their wares on CNN, knowing, apparently, who watches that channel. Claude Aitken urges you to buy a product that will make your dentures stick to your index finger, and somebody else plugs something that foams away berry stains as your choppers sleep for the night in a waterglass. CNN even runs a disconcertingly cheerful commercial by June Allyson about peeing your pants. Well, it's not about peeing your pants exactly. It's about what to wear when you reach the age of incontinence, as it's politely called. Until June told me, I didn't know they made diapers for old folks. June urges us all to get back into life in a geriatric nappy. Possibly this ties in with the vocal plug for CNN in which electronics clang a unison line (it sounds like someone whacking tuned anvils with a meat cleaver) to the voices that urge you to "Experience liiiife! On CNN!" Meantime, *Time* brings "it all right home to you" and a girl tells you that *Life*'s stories — I know you'll think this is strange — just make her cry. If you need CNN and *Time* and *Life* and June Allyson and her giant diapers to get into or back into life, you might as well start watching those weird California commercials for Forest Lawn and the Neptune Society burial-at-sea service.

Just before they started running condom commercials on television, I got a call from a girl doing audience research for KABC-TV in Los Angeles, wanting to know if I would object to them. Are they kidding? After June and her diapers? Of course I had no objection. I even suggested the right place to put them: amid the steamier love scenes in *Falcon Crest* and *Dallas* and the rest. That way you'd hardly notice them: they'd sound like continuations of the dialogue. As it is, we have — along with June — commercials for clinics that cure, or claim to, impotence. An earnest young woman peers into the camera and tells you, "I know he wants to make me happy." After endless talk about impotence and body fluids and incontinence and the big push on condoms, whether on *Falconcrest*, *Dallas* or the Oprah Winfrey or Phil Donahue shows, can ads for the wampus be far behind? To ladies and younger readers, we should explain that a wampus is a hard-rubber prosthetic splint for those who flunk out of impotence clinics. Now there's a challenge for the jingles writers in our group. What kind of music would you use for a wampus? Soft rock? David Clayton Thomas singing *Up Up and Away?*

Of all the networks — and it isn't exactly a network, though an announcer who doesn't know the difference between voiced and unvoiced consonants keeps insisting that it is, no less, "the world's most impordant network" — CNN makes the most ghastly use of music. It is almost entirely electronic. And it goes against the tastes of the very people, if we are to judge by the commercials, who are most likely to be watching the station in the first place.

CNN's music, like so much of the music encountered now in commercials, in movies, in TV dramas, all sounds like it's being done on a Hammond organ with a few horn and flute stops that are somewhat better than those they had in the days or Oxydol and *Our Gal Sunday*, but not, when you get right down to it, better than those on the Wurlitzer. CNN combines the best news with the worst music. Its electronic maunderings are the lowest, dreadful, tinny, nasal, banal, mindless, derivative, and irritating, and it all sounds like something left over from the lost age of Helen Trent.

We've come full circle.

Ted Turner, meet Ma Perkins.

Tristesse in Trieste

In the immediate postwar years, when Great Britain still occupied Trieste — with its mixed Italian and Yugoslavian population —an English comic whose name I forget was to fly there with the RAF to entertain British troops.

His act was closely cued to music and, to his horror, his conductor missed the flight. The comedian at least had the charts. When he arrived in Trieste, he sent out a desperate plea among the British troops to find anyone who might be capable of conducting the orchestra. The orchestra of course was made up

mostly of Italians. Up stepped a Cockney sergeant major who allowed as how he knew jest about everfing vere is to know about music.

Dubiously, the comedian let him to take up a baton in front of the musicians. The sergeant-major said to the orchestra, "Now, right 'ere, at the start, I want you 'a play real soft." (You'll have to read the brisk and confident Cockney accent into this; it can't be spelled.) "Then when we get to letter B — " the t and r suppressed in *letter* " — I want you to play a little louder. Then at letter C, you play faster, and when we get to letter C, I want you to 'i' i'." For Americans not familiar with Cockney, that's "hit it", with the h and t's suppressed.

The sergeant major gave a down beat, producing chaos from the orchestra. He made his little speech again, gave another beat, and elicited even more ghastly sounds. After a few more passes, the comedian, becoming desperate, said to the sergeant major, "I say, wouldn't it be better if you instructed them exactly as it says on the music — *pianissimo, crescendo, accelerando, forte?*"

"Wha', talk to these blokes that way, guv'nor?" said the sergeant major. "They don't even speak fucking English!"

Six Jazz Broadcasters

by Willard Jenkins

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

Jazz radio is a vital link in the jazz community. It keeps the music alive to those who don't — or can't — avail themselves of recordings. And in most cases it is the means by which listeners find out what's new.

Yet few cities in America can boast of full-service, twenty-four-hour, stylistically divergent jazz radio.

Full-service jazz radio is that which pays attention to details. The program hosts know the music. They provide complete information on the recordings they play, *including personnel.* Full-service jazz stations have a finger on the local jazz pulse and give their listeners up-to-date information on jazz events — *whether or not* this information is supported by paid advertising.

By "stylistically divergent," I mean shows and show hosts who are as comfortable with Kid Ory, Olympia Brass Band, and Jelly Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers (not to mention Armstrong and Bechet) as they are with the Art Ensemble of Chicago and Ronald Shannon Jackson's Decoding Society (not to mention Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Bill Evans, Stan Getz, Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, and Joe Pass). It should gives us a sense of historical perspective. Above all, it must entertain us. That's asking a lot, I admit, but we're all entitled to our dreams.

It would not be difficult to find ten opinions among ten jazz enthusiasts as to what the term means. Is it trad, big band, bebop, avant garde, fusion? And you'll find widely differing viewpoints on what jazz radio is supposed to deliver.

This region, the midwest, has only a handful of all-jazz radio stations — like most of the country. But it does, at least, claim a variety of partial jazz formats, random jazz programs, and syndicated jazz programs, with a wide variety of styles. And it has some important jazz radio personalities, several of them of legendary status. So recently I sought out the opinions of six of these clarions of this music.

Chris Colombi is a veteran Cleveland jazz broadcaster and educator, now with WCPN FM five nights a week. He also writes a column on jazz for the Cleveland *Plain Dealer.* Syl Jones is program director of KTCJ FM in Minneapolis. Leigh Kamman is the jazz voice of the upper midwest. His weekly broadcasts from KSJN AM and FM in St. Paul are heard throughout the region on Minnesota Public Radio. Ray Scott is the daily host at WNOP FM, Cincinnati's full-time jazz station, though it has only a "sundowner" license. Oscar Treadwell — for whom Charlie Parker and Thelonious Monk respectively named their compositions *An Oscar for Treadwell* and *Oska T* — is heard on WGUC FM in Cincinnati. Neil Tesser broadcasts on WBEZ FM, Chicagoland Public Radio.

What difficulties, I asked, have you encountered in attempting to maintain a jazz format at your station? And what have you done to make your program a success?

"For starters," Tesser said, "I program a wide range of music. It is not unusual to hear Charlie Parker, John Scofield, vocalist Julie Kelly, middle-period Miles Davis, and the Art Ensemble of Chicago during one of my two-hour shifts.

"To avoid sheer eclecticism, however, I make sure to construct sets — thirteen to twenty minutes — that will move listeners from one musical style to another without big leaps and jarring segues. As a result my programs feature large chunks of music and perhaps a half dozen talk breaks of between two and four minutes."

"Try to develop content and depth," Leigh Kamman responded, while Chris Colombi mentioned the sometimes abhorrent need to maintain a format to keep things flowing: "Planning, and a variation on the old Drake wheel adapted to jazz for a guideline — meant to be ignored when necessary — gives the format some shape."

Poles apart are Syl Jones and Oscar Treadwell — whom Jones, interestingly, credits with being one of his radio heroes.

Jones is with a station that maintains a comparatively tight format in what is called Urban Contemporary, having undergone a change from the station's old "Twin Cities Jazz" philosophy. The noose is tighter around his sound than any of the others. "In commercial radio," Jones said, "you have to give people what they want. At KTCJ we have broadened our format to include pop jazz and R&B. What we are trying to do is play music that bridges pop and jazz, plus R&B. This has broadened our appeal considerably."

Oscar Treadwell's palette seems limitless by comparison. One is liable to hear James Blood Ulmer and Fats Waller within the same segment of his pre-recorded program. "My programs," he said, "have been successful because of a personal commitment to trying to understand the magic and mystery of jazz. And to convey to my listeners the thought that jazz is not just one of the pop-music formats. It is, rather, an explosion of creative genius.

"Further, I show the listener I care about what I tell him. Was it Mel Powell or Teddy Wilson playing piano on a record by Benny Goodman? It's my job to find out. Why does David Murray hold Fred Hopkins in such high esteem? Why do records by (Hannibal) Marvin Peterson and Freddie Keppard belong side by side?"

Ray Scott delineated similar priorities, and added: "A successful jazz radio station must be totally committed to jazz. Each air personality must be very knowledgeable in jazz, sales people must know and believe in their product, and everyone else associated with the station — especially owners and management — must complete a total team. One of the most important contributions to this team is knowing the jazz market."

Colombi, Tesser, Kamman, and Treadwell are with public

radio stations, Jones and Scott in commercial broadcasting. What differences do they perceive between the concerns of the two?

Tesser said, "I have been free to slowly but surely build an audience for less accessible jazz idioms. A commercial station would not have abided the listener drop-off that surely accompanied parts of my musical selection when I first came to WBEZ. But in the years since, I have noticed a definite increase in the number of listeners responding to avant-garde jazz and new-music fusions."

For Chris Colombi the difference between commercial and non-commercial radio is clearcut: "No interruptions for commercials is the first and best reality. Two weeks of fund-raisers on-air around-the-clock each year and a bottom-of-hour appeal for membership support the other fifty weeks is it!"

Leigh Kamman most appreciates the freedom to do things that have become his trademark on Minnesota Public Radio, including the long-form focus on an artist or style. "I have been able to program a broader range of material, including new music. Also, in terms of performance time, longer segments by one artist or a group of artists."

Oscar Treadwell and Syl Jones have worked in both forms of radio. "From 1947 to 1973, I worked on commercial stations," Treadwell said. "Since 1973 I have worked on WGUC, a National Public Radio station with a 99.9 percent classical format. There is no real difference. They both want listeners, the commercial stations to sell their products, the public stations to receive their donations. All the rest is smoke." Treadwell is famous for this kind of uncompromising bluntness. At his last commercial station, he was forbidden by management to play a Thelonious Monk track. He played it over and over again until he got fired.

In addition to his duties at commercial station KTCJ, Syl Jones hosts *Jewels of Jazz* and *Shades of Black* on non-commercial WCAL FM in Minneapolis. "On commercial radio I have to play what sells," he said. "The difference is that between an art gallery and an art museum. In a gallery you have to stock pieces that will be purchased by the public — otherwise you go out of business. In a museum you stock whatever is historically or artistically appropriate. In non-commercial radio, you have the freedom to find an audience, no matter how small, for music that is truly art."

Jones cited two distinct difficulties of programming jazz on radio. The first is "dealing with negative, argumentative, and narrow-minded 'jazz' fans." The second is "seeing the historical, racial, and cultural roots of the music abused, denied, or otherwise destroyed.

"The other difficulty," Tesser added with a smile, "lies in listener demand. With a full night's sleep, good nutrition, and a satisfying love life, I can usually be patient and even polite with people who feel it is their birthright to call and berate you for having played a record that fails to meet *their* definition of 'jazz'. Without the aforementioned nurturing elements, patience runs real thin."

"Trying to please everyone quickly ends up in pleasing no one," Chris Colombi said. "So you have to chart your own course and then follow it."

Kamman sums up the difficulties in one word: "survival".

And Treadwell says, "There is nothing difficult about it."

All six men feel that record companies could and should be doing more with and for jazz. Kamman insists: "The record business needs to review and keep in mind the value of jazz in the marketplace. Jazz artists and materials are to the record business what good books are to publishing."

Treadwell, characteristically, was more acerbic in making his point: "All unreconstructed record producers should hold jobs of manual labor to feed their families. Then they could produce records as a second job, only as a labor of love, and completely under the control and supervision of jazz musicians. And tatooed on their foreheads would be the scarlet letters JAMF." (Oscar overlooks the fact that a large number of record producers and critics too, perhaps most of them, have had independent means and did not need jobs in manual labor or anything else. This is a significant and neglected factor of jazz history. — Ed.)

Colombi sees two desperate needs in jazz: "Good national distribution for *independent* labels. Advertising money, and lots of it, to bring jazz up to maybe five percent of the support commercial music gets, instead of the almost nil support most labels give to jazz now."

"I am impressed," Tesser said, "by the burgeoning of small independent jazz labels. But this development remains problematical. Such labels do not have other types of music on which to fall back if a jazz album starts slowly. As a result they either go out of business, cut back releases, or trim costs everywhere, which leads to technically deficient albums which then sell even fewer copies."

Scott said, "I would like to see each retail outlet employ a jazz specialist." Jones wants to see record companies showing "a better understanding of our problems in radio."

Given the problems, what are the joys of being a jazz radio broadcaster?

Syl Jones: "I have found over the twenty-five years of being a jazz programmer that the jazz audience is the most loyal in all radio."

Neil Tesser: "The opportunity to keep abreast of new music *and* get paid for it. The satisfaction of constructing a set of tunes that sounds right and actually progresses in the hoped-for manner. The chance to talk to listeners who have a similar interest."

Chris Colombi: "Are you kidding? Does an arsonist or a pyromaniac love working with flame? Does a miser delight in counting money? I *run* to work, never have sick days, go anywhere to present and represent the station vis-a-vis the music, and actually get paid to air America's classical music!"

Leigh Kamman: "Knowing that the art of jazz has always had a loyal audience, that artists and their materials are exposed and recognized, that America's role in this medium speaks an international language."

Oscar Treadwell: "Once you know, you cannot unknow .. So: the answer is, peace of mind. Listen to the jazzmen. Take it to heart. Plays what's in their heart."

Willard Jenkins is the jazz director of Arts Midwest, a midwest support group. He is a broadcaster and writer, and contributor to JazzTimes.

When in Rome

Ron Goodwin, the British film composer and conductor, told me this story, which he swore is true.

Ron flew to Rome to record the score he had just written for a picture. He was using a large orchestra. When he got ready to conduct, he noticed that it contained two percussionists. He called the contractor over and pointed out that the score only called for one. What was the second percussionist doing there?

The contractor, Ron swears, told him, "The one, he play good but he don't-a read good. The other one, he read-a good, but he don't-a play good."