Gene Lees
Jazzletter

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Letters

Dear Gene,

My name is Emily Hughes and this letter is regarding Lenny Breau. I recently bought the Legacy album at the students' union record store at the University of Alberta. I requested all of their Lenny Breau recordings and purchased them. Aside from it being incredible music, I have a special interest in Lenny's music.

I am his daughter and within the last three years I have become fascinated with him.

He and my mother were not married. They split up after living together about five years. I was born in 1968 and I believe they split up shortly after that.

I'm writing this in a cafe with many loud noises and distractions. That's my excuse for any errors.

When I was seventeen (I turn twenty-one this October), I suddenly felt a great loss, having learned my biological father was murdered. Hughes is my step-father's name. He adopted me when marrying my mother nine years ago. My mother's name is Judi Singh. She is a vocalist. I guess you wouldn't know her, except perhaps from a recording she did with Woody Shaw in '78. She doesn't sing much any more.

It's like pulling teeth to get her to talk about Lenny. It must have been a very negative part of her life.

Why am I writing to you? I don't really know. There are still two albums I'm unable to get here, so perhaps you would know about that (*Minors Aloud* and *Standard Brands*).

I'm also very interested in any information on any aspect of my father's life you could tell me. I remember seeing him once. My mom says she'd rather I grew up with no father than be exposed to the drugs and so on. So that's what I did. At one point he had really made an effort with her but he was still sneaking around doing drugs a lot and I remember her throwing him out.

One thing that really hurt me was the fact that the *Last Sessions* album was dedicated to his children and there was no mention of me.

My mom is black -- well, her mother was three-quarters Negro and one quarter Cherokee Indian and her father was black and East Indian. There was some Irish in there too, I think. Mom said I shouldn't care because all their friends knew who I was. I've had numerous musicians passing through town tell me about how much Lenny loved me (he had a strange way of showing it).

I hope this isn't boring to you. I may not even send it. Lenny wanted to name me after a Bill Evans tune, which I've never heard. I also noticed a song called *Emily* on the *Mo' Breau* album, I think it was.

I spoke to Chet, my half brother, once, and he told me that Lenny used to keep a baby picture of me with him. Thoughts like that are so special to me. It's all I have. However, having these albums is wonderful. I can listen to them now without crying. I play them over and over -- he was so great. I often wonder how being completely drug-free would have affected his music.

I wish I could see him just once. I know he'd be proud. I have this fantasy about walking into one of his gigs and introducing myself. Yet part of me is very pissed at him. I understand how drugs dominate one's life. He was, maybe, a bit selfish as well.

I'm not very musical. I recently did some singing with a local blues man. I think there are far too many average singers. I'd rather do something I'm super at. Plus, I *hate* the life style! I'm very opposed to alcohol and drug abuse, but I can understand its appeal. I guess I have a healthy fear of drugs. I've never even smoked a joint. I'd probably love it, everyone says.

Sorry I'm getting off topic. It's not very often I get to discuss my father.

I work at Safeway. It's monotonous, but it's unionized, so it's excellent money. I may take a theater arts course in January.

I also do a little modelling, mostly photographic because I'm too short for ramp work.

Why am I telling you all of this? I don't know???

Maybe I'm thinking the more I go on and on, the more of a chance you'll reply. I'd appreciate a letter or a call.

Earlier tonight I was comparing my face to Lenny's on an album cover. There was a drummer from Toronto in town for our jazz festival who says I look a lot like him.

Your description of him was interesting. I pondered over it for quite a while.

From where did you know him? I have some photos from some older contact sheets in my wallet. I'm enclosing them. Tell me if you think we look alike.

I guess that sounds silly, but I just lose it when it comes to this subject. I seare myself. It's like an obsession. I feel so desperate sometimes. When people tell me about him, I record every word in my mind and go over it again and again.

Word has gotten around our small city that I'm curious about Lenny, so I have goofballs approaching me constantly who probably just followed him around for a week. They tell me how well they knew him.

Anyway, I would love it if you could tell me more about him -- his murder, his music, or anything.

Sorry if I got kind of heavy on you.

Hope to hear from you soon.

Thanks.

Emily

Dear Emily:

I am so glad that you wrote to me.

I didn't know your father well. I met him in Toronto, and I no longer remember who introduced us. He used to play solo in a little coffee house there, and I went by to hear him several times, and chatted with him between sets. To the best of my knowledge, he was not using heroin at that time, and because he knew I was a friend of Bill Evans, he talked to me frankly if not extensively about his struggle to overcome it.

It is difficult, and ultimately futile, to say who is the best

musician on any instrument, but I do know several guitarists who feel that Lenny is unequalled. He was enormously admired by other guitarists. I just did a broadcast for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation on Canadian guitarists, a tape of which I will obtain for you. One of them was your father. As you may know, he was born in Maine; but I do know from my conversations with him that he considered himself Canadian, having spent so much of his life in Canada. However, he used to go back to Maine, particularly during his attempts to kick heroin. He had good friends there; I will put you in touch with some of them.

His parents were, I am told, country-and-western performers. The guitar is the central instrument of that tradition, and even in the United States most of the best jazz guitarists, both black and white, have come out of those parts of the country where this tradition is strongest. You mention your half brother Chet. I know that he was named after Chet Atkins. As a producer for RCA, Chet was the first to record your father, in an album made in Nashville. It was this album, made more than twenty years ago, that first brought Lenny to my attention. He was absolutely in a class by himself.

There are two ways to play the guitar, one with a pick and one with the fingers. The former is the one that has predominated in jazz. The latter is the one that is used in "classical" guitar. When it is used as a linear instrument, instead of strummed for rhythm, the jazz guitar is usually amplified. For a long time, it was not possible to amplify the "classical" guitar; for the past twenty-five years or so there has been a ceramic pickup that will work with the classical guitar, which nowadays uses nylon strings. The amplification of the "jazz" guitar was achieved by small devices that go under each steel string to set up a magnetic response to the vibrations of the notes. The importance of this is not so much that it makes the guitar louder as that it makes the notes sustain longer, permitting the guitar to be used more or less like a wind instrument.

Before I heard Lenny, I felt that it was unlikely that anyone would ever play good jazz on the classical guitar. It is a difficult instrument -- extremely so. Hugo Friedhofer, a great film composer who loved the guitar and used it effectively in some of his scores, described it as "an unforgiving instrument." But it can do some things the amplified guitar, played with a pick, can't. For one thing, it can produce two or more threads of melody at the same time, what are called counterlines. And it can play true chords, that is notes played simultaneously. When you stroke a pick across the strings, you get what is sometimes called a broken chord.

Because of the complexity of playing these counterlines, and the problems of the reaches of the fingers of the left hand, I thought for a long time that music on the classical guitar would probably always have to be worked out in advance -- that true jazz improvisation on it would be difficult, which indeed it is. I also had a notion that because of the way it is plucked with the fingers, it would never be possible to produce on the instrument melody lines with that rhythmic swing that is essential to jazz. The great Brazilian guitarists, who use the classical guitar essentially as a rhythm instrument, do make it swing. But I long harbored the notion that it would never be possible to improvise great jazz on the classical guitar. Lenny proved this to be untrue: I knew it the moment I heard that first album.

Lenny was not the first person to try it, however. Charlie Byrd, a very good musician, experimented with it before he did, although the first man I ever heard do it was a guitarist named Al Viola. However, Viola wrote the arrangements he recorded; they were not improvised.

One of the amazing things about your father is that he could not read music. This is by no means unprecedented in jazz, and in other forms of music. Many, perhaps most, of the great Spanish flamenco guitarists cannot read music, and two of the greatest of all jazz guitarists, Charlie Christian and Wes Montgomery, couldn't read either. Neither could a phenomenal country-and-western guitarist named Thumbs Carlille.

But I was astounded when I first learned this about your father, because his classical-guitar technique was so true and pure. When I first heard him, I simply assumed from the very nature of his playing that he'd had very good formal training.

The classical guitar has a limited range of volume. Some classical guitarists, including a great English guitarist named Julian Bream, use tone to shape their phrases. If you pluck the classical guitar with your right hand held up near the neck, you get a harp-like sound. As you draw your hand back, placing it over the hole, the sound gets harder and fuller; finally, if you place your hand back near the bridge, you get a brittle, almost metallic sound. Bream can use these changes in sound color to remarkable effect in phrasing music. So could your father. It was this mastery, the correctness and purity of his approach, that made me assume he was trained.

I was always astounded at the range of musical influences, from country music to Stravinsky to Bill Evans and Miles Davis and other jazz people, in his playing. He could slip back and forth between the traditions effortlessly.

In the latter years, he applied his classical guitar technique to the amplified steel-string guitar, and I know he was using a seven string instrument. Sometimes he blended the classical technique with the more customary, in jazz, use of the pick. I was listening closely to one of his records a month or so ago, a tune he wrote called *Toronto*. It sounded to me as if he was holding a pick between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand to play melody and using the other three fingers to play chords. He was not the first to do this; the first guitarist I ever saw do it is a man named Chuck Wayne. But your father certainly mastered this device. Indeed, I can think of no aspect of guitar technique he had not mastered. He was an astonishing guitarist.

Bill Evans was a particularly close friend of mine. And I know that your father idolized him. He told many people, including me, that his goal was to adapt Bill's approach to harmony to the guitar. I think he succeeded to a remarkable extent. Bill too was a heroin addict. He gave it up, but got into cocaine, and it was this drug even more than the heroin that led to his final physical deterioration and death.

Your attitude to drugs, alcohol among them, is healthy

indeed. And I certainly understand your mother's not wanting you to be exposed to drugs. However, not all jazz musicians are junkies, despite what *Bird* and a recent documentary about the trumpeter Chet Baker and other movies might lead you to believe. I have known many who have had very good lives, and raised their families, and ended up with quite a bit of money; indeed a few have gotten rich. But such stories are not particularly dramatic, which is why they will probably never make a movie about Dizzy Gillespie.

Do not believe what your friends tell you about marijuana. I do have a few friends who have used it with apparent impunity. I gave it up about twenty-five years ago and will not touch it. Although I enjoyed it at first, in time it made me hideously paranoid, producing a kind of panic that one friend of mine (a musician who also gave it up) called "the horrors".

Pot users always laughed at the propaganda that it led to heroin use. But Bill Evans, who surely knew a thing or two about drugs, thought it could. Bill told me that he started with pot but then found that he would forget the music in the middle of performing. Pot has some strange effects on the memory; I find there are some serious blanks in mine from the period of a year or so when I used it. In any event I know what Bill meant. Having grown used to playing while stoned, Bill then turned to heroin, which had no such comparable effect on the memory.

Alcohol is water soluble, and metabolizes out of the system at the rate of about an ounce an hour. Cocaine and marijuana and other of the "recreational drugs" -- what a bitter joke that term has become -- are fat soluble, and remain much longer in the system. Stress, heat, and other effects can give you a buzz long after you've quit using. A study I read some years ago indicated that it takes about nine months to rid the body of the active ingredient from marijuana use. I was getting after-flashes, including the panic, for nearly a year after I quit. Don't let anybody ever kid you about marijuana or booze. They are dangerous, even if not so deadly as some of the other drugs now around. Our society is in a crisis over drugs, and I think it is remarkable that you have stayed free of them. You have all my admiration for it. Don't ever change.

I cannot even guess what being drug-free might have done to or for your father's music. I can tell you this:

There was in New York a piano teacher named John Mehegan. He too was a friend of Bill Evans. John told Bill that because it was so widely known that Bill was a user, a lot of young pianists, including some among his students, thought that maybe heroin would help them too become great players. This upset Bill terribly, and he asked John to turn on a tape recorder. He taped a lecture against heroin use for John to play for his students. (I have no idea what ever happened to that tape; and John is dead.) One of the things Bill said on that tape was that he did not begin using heroin until he was twenty-eight -- by which time his approach to the piano was essentially formed. And Bill said that he thought that if he had never become involved with heroin, he might have achieved more than he actually had.

I can also tell you that Charlie Parker too warned younger players against emulating him by using heroin. And, finally, I can tell you that Lenny certainly wasn't proud of his habit.

The song you were named after was not written by Lenny, or by Bill Evans either. It is by Johnny Mandel, to whom I read your letter on the telephone. It is the theme from a film called *The Americanization of Emily*, and I'll see that Johnny makes a tape of it for you. It has been widely recorded. Tony Bennett and Frank Sinatra, among others, have recorded it. Bill recorded it for Fantasy; I'll get that record for you as well. It's a gorgeous melody with a wonderful lyric by Johnny Mercer, which I will write out for you.

As for the various strains of your racial background, be proud of them. You are the way of the future. We will learn to love one another or we're not going to make it. I have long insisted that the real issue in desegregation is not the classroom but the bedroom. Racism is the creation of men, not women. It is based on a man's unspoken and in most cases even unconscious belief that it is perfectly all right for him to bed the women of other ethnic groups, but not for the men of other groups to bed those of his own. At base racism is sexist, and it is one of the most vicious of all human defects. Try not to let it get to you.

I would not be surprised if Lenny too had some American Indian in his background. I have always assumed he came of French-Canadian stock. There was a considerable migration of French Canadians down into the New England states, particularly Maine, over the years, and although the language has been lost, the names persist. I wish I had asked him more about it; I will ask some people who knew him. In the early days, there was quite a bit of marriage between the French population and the Indians. Lenny, I thought, had a slight Indian look. The mixture of African and Cherokee, by the way, is quite common, and many black American jazz musicians, including my friend Art Farmer (who is part Blackfoot) have Indian blood too. Often slaves ran away and joined the Cherokee Nation. If you are horrified by what was done to Africans in America, you should also read what the white man did to the Cherokees (among other tribes), a civilized people who had developed their own form of democracy and a court system and a written language. One of my nephews is part Cherokee. He's proud of it, and you should be too.

Yes, I do see a resemblance to Lenny in your photos. It's around the eyes. You certainly are a beautiful girl. I am not surprised that you're not tall; Lenny wasn't either. Indeed, he was kind of fragile. I liked him very much, by the way. He may have been selfish. Artists to some extent always are. It takes tremendous willful blind dedication to become truly great, as Lenny was, at any of the arts. But there was a gentleness about Lenny, a sweetness in his nature, that is in his music, and obviously is in you as well.

I do not know this of first-hand knowledge, but one of Lenny's friends told me that the Los Angeles police know who murdered him but can't prove it. So his death is officially, I presume, an unsolved crime. If it is any consolation, you were not the only one to be deprived: his death was a loss to us all.

I would like to see you study music, not to become a

professional musician but to understand just how great a musician your father really was. I will put you in touch with people, both in Canada and the U.S., who knew your father better than I did, so that you may learn more about him. But I would plead with you not to let the obsession ruin your life. You have far too much to look forward to.

I would like your permission to print your letter so that anyone who has more to tell us about Lenny will get in touch with me about him. Don't hesitate to call or write to me, and be assured of my wishes for your happiness.

Gene Lees

Emily lives in Edmonton, Alberta. I'm not going to print her address, because I don't want it to fall accidentally into the wrong hands. She hardly needs nut cases trying to cozy up to her. But anyone who has anything to tell her about Lenny can write to her through the Jazzletter.

Of Cholerie Chauvinists

by Stanley Dance

In the May *Jazzletter*, Gene Lees did me a serious injustice. Quoting selectively from my short review of James Lincoln Collier's *The Reception of Jazz in America*, he omitted its key sentence, a concise refutation of Collier's main argument, as follows: "It should be perfectly obvious to anyone not wearing chauvinistic blinkers that jazz was something Americans enjoyed and understandably *took for granted* long before it ceased to be more than a novelty in Europe."

Fortunately or unfortunately, I am considerably older than Lees and Collier. It is a fact that I was listening to jazz appreciatively before either of them was born, and I was reading magazines like *Orchestra World* and *Phonograph Monthly Review*, which Collier has now triumphantly exhumed, as they were published. I disliked Collier's monograph because in it in effect he set up a straw man to show how smart he was in knocking it down. Having done that -- a cheap journalistic ploy -- he went on to discredit European jazz criticism in a shameful manner.

Knowing that I was born and raised in England, Lees took his cue from this and my review to indulge in an intemperate exhibition of Brit-bashing. But I had not written my review from a British viewpoint, because in the early period with which Collier was primarily concerned I was myself in disagreement with what passed for jazz criticism in Britain. It was heavily influenced by American white musicians, mostly from New York, who worked in London, and by the *Melody Maker*'s New York correspondent, a gentleman of parochial interests. As a result, Red Nichols, Miff Mole, Joe Venuti, Eddie Lang, Bix Beiderbecke, and Frank Trumbauer were considered to be the greatest jazz exponents, while black musicians, with few exceptions, were all too often dismissed as "negroid" or "crude." This attitude persisted into the '30s until columns written by John Hammond brought about wholesale changes in opinion.

Meanwhile, Hugues Panassie in France had encountered white musicians from Chicago who had had the great advantage of hearing firsthand masters from New Orleans like King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, and Jimmie Noone. If Panassie overstressed the importance of these Chicagoans, he was still closer to the truth than those who were influencing British opinion, and he courageously corrected his errors of judgment in a second book.

In the early days of jazz writing, everyone was searching, making discoveries, trying to identify soloists, and revising estimates. There was far more cooperation than competitio[n]. When Panassie and Charles Delaunay founded *Jazz Hot* (th[e] bi-lingual magazine) in 1935, it was in order to provide a platform *entirely* devoted to jazz, and writers were invited regardless of nationality. Besides such Americans as John Hammond, Wilder Hobson, Marshall Stearns, George Frazier, and Preston Jackson, French, Canadian, British, Dutch, Swiss, and Roumanian writers quickly took advantage of the opportunity. It was a true international forum and Lees is wrong in claiming that "Panassie and company" set it up because "outlets to the larger public, particularly intellectual publications, were not open to them on the subject." Panassie had regularly contributed to *Jazz Tango Dancing* and also wrote in *Ondes* alongside Blase Cendrars, Gertrude Stein and Paris intellectuals of all kinds.

Lees also says my mention of the British magazine *Melody Maker* and Panassie's first book as preceding American counterparts by several years was irrelevant. Why so? They are merely good examples of the intense interest jazz had aroused in Europe. The intensity Europeans had brought to jazz criticism sprang from the fact that they could not count on hearing the music frequently as Americans could. [F]or example, the greatest impact any jazz group ever made [i]n England was made by the Ellington band in 1933, but it did not return until a quarter-century later. Collier sees evil in the success of British musicians in instituting a ban on American bands in 1935, but their union was responsible for it only when the American union refused to permit British bands to play in the U.S.

Both Collier and Lees pretend that Europeans generally believed they had better jazz critics and were more appreciative of jazz than Americans. Having lived in Europe over forty years, I know this to be untrue. As I said in my review, it was Americans musicians who made the claims about appreciation. Lees suggests that they were just "sucking up to the press." Well, whose press? They didn't say it in Europe, but in the U.S. on their return home, and they are still saying it! As recently as last year, in *The Nevadan Today*, one of the earliest jazz musicians to visit Europe, Garvin Bushell, told drummer Billy Moody, "France woke America up to jazz."

Collier blames European writers for not coming to the source to hear jazz, knowing full well that only lack of funds and time deterred them. Most were amateurs who enjoyed at best a fortnight's vacation each year, and that at a time when

the fastest Atlantic crossing took nearly a week. No grants or fellowships were then available to facilitate such journeys or jazz research of any kind. Collier's rebuke ill becomes one who wrote books about Armstrong and Ellington, whom he had never bothered to meet and whose closest living musical associates he never bothered to interview. A national Endowment for the Humanities fellowship supported his Armstrong research, and I.S.A.M. research fellowships supported that on Ellington and the monograph under discussion. Lees questions my reference to grants, but I would maintain that a "fellowship" is more or less a euphemism for a grant.

Appreciation of jazz is not just a matter of newspaper hacks writing kind words about something that appeals to the public. There are examples of the kind of articles that evidently excited Collier in *Virgil Thompson Reader*, an accessible Obelisk paperback. Appreciation is best shown any art by the way it is supported, and Americans clearly supported jazz in considerable numbers in the '20s, but it was not regarded as "high art" or as "America's classical music" in those days despite the efforts of Paul Whiteman and others to gussy it up. Jazz and dance music were synonymous, even though most of the dance music had little jazz content.

Squirrel Ashcraft was an American who took a serious interest in jazz early on. A catalog-file that he prepared during the late '20s while at Princeton was concerned with sixteen bands, only one of which was black, Fletcher Henderson's. Described it as "best of the dance hall bands," he commended it for its "adaptation" of *Rhapsody in Blue*. Significantly, he noted none of its soloists, but he knew those in the white bands and his "Mythical All-American Orchestra" was entirely white with the exception of Armstrong. Later, of course, Ellington, Hines, and Hawkins were among pencilled additions, along with Goodman and Krupa. The Bix legend was already in full flower and he wrote, "I can't agree with Mole and Pettis in saying that he (Armstrong) is the best." His interest in Jack Pettis, then with Ben Bernie, is typical of how one had to seek out jazz in commercial bands. I mention all this because Ashcraft's file mirrors the main concerns of British enthusiasts at that time.

R.D. Darrell, whom Collier seeks to promote as the first jazz critic, wrote about jazz as dance music in *The Phonograph Monthly Review*, where he had so little space and so many records to deal with that his comments often consisted of single adjectives, with the result that it was difficult for inexperienced readers to distinguish between a cornball outfit like the Six Jumping Jacks and a genuine jazz group. He was undoubtedly perceptive, but jazz was never his main interest and his Ellington article appeared only in *Disques*, a magazine of minute circulation published by a Philadelphia record store. Collier also brings up the name of Enzo Archetti, who was, as it happened, introduced to me in the early '30s by a mutual friend. Archetti was primarily an opera buff, and he wanted records by singers like Ninon Vallin and Conchita Supervia that were not available in the U.S. We traded records right up to WW II; he gradually became interested in jazz through listening to jazz records I asked for, and this eventually led to his writing about them in *American Music Lover's Guide*.

Despite a friendly relationship, I had not been aware that Gene Lees was an Anglophobe, but he leads off his assault on the vile Brits by quoting Sir Henry Coward, who was born, he says, in 1849! Good grief. He then cites with apparent disapproval the fact that his own father was "proud of being an Englishman." Now patriotism is not uncommon in the U.S. or Canada, so I fail to see what was so reprehensible about his father's sentiments. England had produced a lot of great men, had abolished slavery in 1933, had fought two world wars victoriously from beginning to end, and had then, enlightened by the experience, given up -- nobody took it away -- the biggest empire the world had ever known.

According to Lees, Whitney Balliett heads the list of American writers who "bother" Brits. This will surely be news to Whitney, who is admired and praised by many. But Lees offers proof in the shape of a review in *The Times Literary Supplement*. Unfortunately, it was written by Francis Davis, a genuine American who lives in Philadelphia. There is, of course, reason to suspect that Collier is a patriot, as witness his profound, flag-wrapped declaration at the end of his monograph to the effect that "what is essential to jazz is precisely the Americanism that lies at its heart." That's what those black mammies (pardon, "nannies", see his page 3) were probably teaching their white charges down south.

A lot of space is wasted attacking *The Harmony Illustrated Encyclopedia of Jazz*, which was obviously written, illustrated and produced with the laudable objective of attracting some of the less moronic rock followers to jazz. Then Lees gets very picky with *Jazz: the Essential Companion*, before turning to the grand fiasco, *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, which was published by a British company. Since it was edited by an American and largely written by Americans, it seems somewhat unfair to have included it in an anti-British outburst, especially since Gene gives no credit to British discographers like Rust, Sheridan, Godrich, Dixon, Ledbitter and Slaven, who followed the pioneering Schleman and provided invaluable tools for critics and historians. The greatest work in this area has, in fact, been done by non-Americans despite the big Atlantic ditch, and more for love than money, because discography is hard work that is singularly ill rewarded. Without Delaunay, Jepson, Bruynickz, Ruppli and now Raben, too, a lot of self-important writers would be in trouble.

Among .Gene's complaints about the Grove work is the omission of Helen Keane, whom he describes as "the first woman jazz producer of importance." Maybe, but Helen Oakley was producing records by Chu Berry, Frank Newton, Billy Kyle, Jimmy Mundy, Johnny Hodges, Cootie Williams, Rex Stewart, Barney Bigard, and Sidney Bechet back in 1937, and others earlier than that in Chicago.

More errors occur in an inexplicable assault on Gunther Schuller's *The Swing Era*. (Could it be that Schuller's forbears were Angles or Saxons?) Lees tells about things he knew that Gunther didn't, and suggest Gunther ought to have made more phone calls. I would suggest that Gene ought to have called Yale University, because in correcting Schuller he says Fletcher

Henderson "wrote for or sold to Goodman maybe twenty charts; Spud Murphy contributed about fifty to that band's library." But Yale has 215 Henderson charts in its Goodman collection, and 129 by Jimmy Mundy.

I feel regret in having provoked the Lees tirade, but I am genuinely puzzled by it. At another time and in another country, I would have ascribed it to a colonial's inferiority complex. Gene evidently feels Collier has been unfairly persecuted, but I do not think he heard him addressing the Duke Ellington Society in New York. Gene evidently feels Collier has been unfairly persecuted, but I do not think he heard him addressing the Duke Ellington Society in New York. He loves Leonard Feather, too, and even gives him free advertising for his books, but he did not quote Leonard's 1987 opinion -- as Collier did -- that jazz "was belittled or ignored or condescended to for half a century by most white Americans." Leonard was quite right. It still is. By most Europeans, too.

-- SD

by James Lincoln Collier

It has been borne in on me in recent years that there exists in jazz a gospel, a dogma, which can be questioned only at risk of sending the furies loose in the streets, with foam streaming from their muzzles. This is not, of course, anything new: most human beings evolve belief systems which usually have more to do with their ego needs than anything else. This is why scholars have developed certain rules of evidence -- documentation, peer review, and the like -- to try to get it right. My brother, a distinguished historian, once said, "I don't know what's true, I only know what I can document."

In the past couple of decades a number of people, whose names are not known to most jazz fans, have been attempting to apply scholarship methods to the study of jazz. They are discovering that the bulk of what is generally believed about the music is -- well, we must not say untrue, but difficult to document. Many of the big-name jazz writers have been upset by this exercise, because much, if not most, of what they have written is turning out to be of questionable accuracy. I realize that many jazz fans dislike the "academizing" of the music; but it does seem to me that if jazz is worth writing about, it is worth writing about with care.

Stanley Dance's rejoinder to Gene Lees' comments on Dance's review of my monograph on early jazz criticism is a case in point. It is a mishmash of supposition, half-truth, hunch, and outright error. The problem is that Dance has not bothered to do any research on the matter in question. He has, instead, depended mainly on his "memory" -- that is to say, what he chooses to believe -- of events that took place fifty years ago. Dance's memory may be better than mine -- I can hardly remember what I had for breakfast this morning -- but it can be shown to have its weaknesses. Let us proceed.

(1) To begin with, much of what Dance has to say in his rejoinder is simply irrelevant. The gist of the monograph in question is as follows: (a) I attempted to show, using contemporary documents, that jazz was widely popular in the United States from World War I on; (b) I quoted copiously from jazz writing dating back to 1917 in an attempt to show that it was being written about seriously in America in major media at that time; (c) and again using contemporary documents, I attempted to show that Europeans did not begin giving jazz serious consideration until about a decade later. Dance has obfuscated the issue by not providing his readers with any dates; but in fact the activity he talks about -- the founding of *Jazz Hot*, the Panassie-Delaunay collaboration and such -- took place in the 1930s, long after there had been considerable first-rate jazz criticism in the United States. Hugues Panassie, on his own admission, did not hear a jazz record of any kind until 1927, by which time R.D. Darrell was regularly reviewing jazz records for the *Phonograph Monthly Review*, and others had written about it in magazines like *The Atlantic* and the *New York Times Magazine*. Dance has not given any evidence of any European jazz writing which predates the American stuff. He has, thus, failed to address the main argument, and on this alone his rejoinder falls.

(2) In saying that it is widely believed that jazz was better appreciated in Europe than at home, Dance claims that I have set up a straw man to be knocked down. To the contrary, I quote from fifteen major jazz writers as saying precisely that, among them such straw men as Whitney Balliett, John Hammond, and Charles Delaunay.

(3) The contretemps between the British and American musicians was not started by the Americans, but by the British and other Europeans in the early 1920s when they fought to ban American dance band musicians who were soaking up a lot of work in Europe. Dance has not troubled to look the matter up, but has depended on his memory of events that took place when he was a boy. I *have* looked the matter up, and the documentation is in my recent biography of Benny Goodman.

(4) Dance quotes Garvin Bushell as saying that France woke America up to jazz. Bushell is wrong, and the fact that he happens to be a jazz musicians does not matter. Zutty Singleton and Bud Freeman, both of whom went to Europe on the supposition that things were better for jazz there, came home quickly saying that the whole thing was pernicious nonsense. Their words are in the monograph.

(5) Dance says I shouldn't have written biographies of Armstrong and Ellington without meeting them. As a matter of fact, I was quite eager to talk to them, but it proved difficult, as they were both dead. I suppose Dance would tell James Thomas Flexner that he should not have written his monumental biography of George Washington because he was unable to interview him. Dance says I ought to have talked to certain of Armstrong's and Ellington's associates. How does he know which people refused to talk to me? Has he checked?

(6) Dance says I had a grant to write the monograph in question. I did not. The grant from the Institute for Studies in American Music was for the Ellington book. The idea for

the monograph had not occurred to me or anybody at the Institute at the time the grant was awarded. In fact, I put far more time into researching and writing it than I will ever get paid for. Nor have grants "supported" the writing of my other books. These grants, for which I am most grateful, *helped* to support the research; the bulk of the support was, as is usually the way, from the author. Since grants of this kind are a matter of public record, Dance could have found all this out for himself before writing about it, had he chosen to.

(7) Dance says that Europeans could not come to America in the early days because they were too poor. Two *Melody Maker* editors came in 1929, the English critic Spike Hughes came in 1933, Panassie came in 1938, Dance, Leonard Feather, Hsmme Rosencranz and others came in the mid-1930s. Furthermore, some of these early European admirers of jazz were not poor at all: they came from moneyed families. Panassie's problem was that he came to study jazz after he had written his book on the subject, instead of before.

(8) Jazz was indeed called an "art" by Americans in the early days. I quote Olin Downes precisely using that term in the New York *Times* in 1924. (We remember that Panassie, generally believed to be the first European jazz critic, did not even hear a jazz record until three years later.) Downes was talking of good jazz, too, not dance music. Stanley Dance has not bothered to review the relevant material; indeed, in reading his rejoinder it at times appears that he has not read the monograph, despite having reviewed it.

(9) As Dance says, jazz and dance music were synonymous in the minds of many people in the United States at the time. However, they were not synonymous in the minds of R.D. Darrell, editor of America's only record magazine; Carl Engel, head of the Library of Congress's music division; Olin Downes; and composer Virgil Thomson, as well as thousands of ordinary jazz fans. These men are quoted to that effect in the monograph.

(10) What difference does it make that Squirrel Ashcraft, at the time a college kid, preferred Bix to Armstrong? A lot of people did. But not Darrell, or Abbey Niles, both of whom were reviewing Armstrong's Hot Five records as they were coming out, at a time when virtually nobody in European had even heard of Armstrong.

(11) Some of Darrell's comments on jazz records did indeed consist of single adjectives. But many, especially as Darrell's grasp of jazz grew firm in 1929, were reasonably long. In response I sent him two or three of Darrell's longer reviews, as well as a piece Darrell wrote in 1927 on the state of jazz which was several pages long, to my mind the best overview of jazz written to that time. Dance replied to the effect, "Yes, it was just as I remembered, one-line reviews." In the monograph I quote from several of Darrell's reviews, one of them thirty lines long (the quotation was thirty lines long; the actual review was longer), in which he compares Ellington to Stravinsky. How seriously can you take anyone who denies the existence of documents when they are in front of him?

It goes to show the power of belief systems once they are established. Anyone interested in reading Darrell's work will find the first and third volumes of *Phonograph Monthly Review* in the music library at Lincoln Center, and the second volume at the Institute for Jazz Studies at Rutgers in New Jersey.

(12) Dance wholly misinterprets Gene Lees' statement about the arrangements Fletcher Henderson wrote for Goodman. The point was that Schuller claimed that Goodman *built* his band on Henderson's arrangements. Over many years Henderson did indeed write a lot of charts for Benny, but at the beginning Henderson was only one of several arrangers --not the first, not the most important -- who contributed to the Goodman book. I have examined the Goodman material at Yale. Has Dance?

(13) If Dance believes that Marxism was simply an "intellectual fad" among young people in the 1930s he is exhibiting an ignorance of American history that is both broad and deep. I grew up in that milieu -- an uncle of mine was an editor on the *New Masses*, and an aunt was called before the House UnAmerican Activities Committee in 1938 at a time when Dance was still trying to figure out who sneezed during Hot Lips Smithers' second chorus on *Jazz Me Blues*. To thus cavalierly dismiss the risks those people took as "fadism" is mindless and cruel.

(14) Dance's memory of English history also wants some homework. England did not voluntarily dispose of its empire. What does Dance think that Ghandi was doing for all those years? Passive resistance was invented for use against the English. Has Dance forgotten that Anthony Eden sent British troops to prevent Egypt from taking over the Suez Canal? And that the first nation to criticize the British in the United Nations for her action was Canada? And that England was reined in by Eisenhower and Dulles?

Has he forgotten the Falklands, Gibraltar? The English gave up the empire because they had been flattened by World War I, and no longer had the wherewithal to keep the colonies in line. Nor does the fact that the English gave up slavery in 1833 mean much. Sure they gave it up -- they had hardly any slaves and it cost them little. But they continued to enrich themselves for another hundred years on the sweat of hundreds of millions of people in Asia, Africa, and even the British Isles, as any Irishman can tell you. England has always had a good record when there weren't any races around. But in 1932 when Louis Armstrong first visited London he was turned away from about a dozen hotels because he was black. When I was living in London some twenty years ago, Pakki-bashing was a sport enjoyed by British "bovver boys". And anyone who has been in the English midlands recently knows that Americans have little to teach the English about racism. Finally, the idea that the English won World War II single-handedly, which is commonly believe in England, needs checking: the United States lost more troops dead, wounded, and missing than the English did in that war. You could look it up.

(15) Finally, Dance speaks of "covert racists here who emerged from the closets during the Reagan years." I am fairly confident that he is referring to me, as Muhal Richard Abrams told the Duke Ellington Society the same thing, a tape of which discussion Dance has heard. In any case, if he is not

referring to me, who is he referring to? Gene Lees? Once again Dance has not bothered to look up the facts. Has he checked to see what Civil Rights activities I have engaged in, what Civil Rights organizations I might have belonged to, what I might have written in support of the black cause, even in the Reagan years? Obviously, he has not.

In fact he has checked nothing. He has simply set down on paper what came into his head that he thought might defeat my argument, and along the way has taken a couple of cheap shots at me -- unsubstantiated accusations of racism which smack of McCarthyism.

Dance, of course, is not alone in presenting his opinions as matters of fact. Many of the big-name jazz critics have been doing precisely that for decades. Fortunately, as the young jazz scholars continue to go over the ground, the works of these people will increasingly be seen for what it is -- jazz journalism, and not very good journalism for the most part. And it is likely that I will be lumped in with the rest of them.

Recently I ran into one of these young scholars who was working on a study of Jimmy Blanton, and claimed that much of what is believed about Blanton is incorrect. He said to me, "We're going to revise everything you guys have been saying."

He was including me, the dastardly revisionist; and if I'm going to be in trouble with the young Turks, who do you suppose is going to happen to the works of Dance and his ilk? You ain't seen nothing' yet, fellas.

-- JLC

To Mr. Collier's remarks, I would add a few things. Mr. Dance does to me what he does to Collier: shoots off at side angles of issues. I wondered if he had ever actually read the monograph in question. He simply says, in effect, that Collier is a bad guy, a man of unexplained evil, and you shouldn't listen to him, and he never confronts Collier's citations.

As Grover Sales once said, "Most jazz critics would rather catch another jazz critic in an error than bring Bix back from the dead." Stanley illustrates the point in the pleasure he takes in catching me in two errors, even a typo. If I was unaware that Helen Oakley, who is Mrs. Dance, had so extensive an experience as a producer, it is because, like other reference books, the *New Grove* doesn't say so. It mentions her only as an appendage to the entry on Stanley, and only as a critic. It was hardly my intention to slight Mrs. Dance, and I apologize to her for inadvertently doing so. It was to point out the arbitrary nature of the inclusions. Her exclusion underlines the very point I was making. There is no entry on Bob Thiele either. As for the criticism of Whitney Balliett being written by an American in this instance, English writers go after him too. (In private letters, some of them go after Mr. Dance.) Whitney bugs them because he can outwrite them.

Mr. Dance missed the major error in my piece: I said Rob Darrell was alive. He died two years ago. His sister has invited me to their home in the country north of New York City, so that I may look at his papers. (I am particularly curious about the correspondence between John Hammond, then a student, and Darrell, if it can be found.) I suppose Mr. Dance will say that those papers don't exist.

To call me a chauvinist for saying that the Americans first "appreciated" jazz is absurd, for the simple reason that I am not now and have not ever been an American. But that's typical of how Mr. Dance overlooks facts. I am a Canadian, of a Lancashire father and a mother born in London, with grandparents from Lancashire, Bristol, and London, tracing back to Norman French, to Sephardic Jews who came to England in the court of William and Mary, and Scots who came down across the border on cattle raids. I was taught English history but not American history in school. I was steeped in English tradition. Perhaps Mr. Dance is unaware of how powerful was the English influence in Canada until, within the past decade, we finally threw off the yoke and [redacted] our own constitution. Don't try selling the French Canadians on the joys of British rule. And if you want to discuss it with a Scot, be sure you mention the Clearances. You can't discuss it with descendants of the Clearances, of course. There aren't any. The core of the black population of Canada came from Jamaica before England abolished slavery. Those African folk had the timerity to rise against slavery, for which their gentle rulers hanged their leaders or, worse, left them dangling in irons for birds to eat, and shipped the remnants to Halifax.

I don't think England has the worst Colonial record; that honor probably goes to Belgium. But her empire-building wasn't the exercise in extending civilization -- the white man's burden and all that -- the English would have you believe.

A survey a few years ago showed that something like sixty percent of English people *admitted* that they were racist. A lot of Americans at least have the taste to be uneasy about it and pretend they're not, which hypocrisy probably modifies their behavior. My sister married a Chinese physician when they were still students. They lived in San Francisco and London before settling in Montreal, which city they elected because they found it the least racist of any they had ever encounte[redacted] She has told me horror stories of their trying to find housing in England, and of the similar experiences of young doctors from Africa and India. Once on the tube in London, when she was holding her baby daughter in her arms, someone with Cockney accent came close to her and kept chanting, "American bitch, Japanese bastard." And my sister slowly turned and said, "Wrong on all four counts." I wouldn't recommend that anyone try to sell her on the racial tolerance of the English.

I have many English friends, some of them my relatives. To coin a phrase, some of my best friends are English.

It's curious. I can write harsh criticism of things American and Canadian without anyone inveighing against me for Yank-bashing or Canuck-bashing. Let one essay in eight years of the *Jazzletter* suggest that the British (and French!) are, well, just not quite the ominiscient authorities on jazz (and America) they perceive themselves to be, and good heavens, it's Brit-bashing. The very word "colonial" bespeaks bigotry, not to mention pomposity. It is in a class with any other ethnic epithet and anyone who uses it even in passing defines not me but himself.

-- GL